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WHAT'S NEXT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NEW YORK CITY?

State, City Policy Makers Consider
Agenda To Move Toward More Integrated
System of Early Care and Education



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With a new governor in Albany and a brand-new interagency group working on early childhood policy in the Mayor's office, early childhood advocates across the city were already pondering what changes might be afoot—and whether the time had come for the city to move toward a more integrated, high-quality system of early care and education.

Certainly, programs and providers across the city were preparing for the next round of important changes: The Department of Education (DOE) was actively considering how to offer full-day pre-k and had issued its first-ever Request for Proposal for full-day pre-k to community-based providers. The Governor had proposed adding \$99 million statewide to public pre-k, with \$60 million targeted for the city. The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) was pressing ahead with its Strategic Plan, aiming to boost enrollment in city-contracted centers and moving to serve more infants and toddlers.

Given such momentous change in city and state policy directions, CCI convened a working forum in late March, "*Building the Best: What's Next for Early Care and Education?*" with top city and state officials keynoting the event. Co-sponsored by the Early Childhood Strategic Group and Quality New York, the event was meant to both update providers and advocates on new policy developments and to spark dialogue and conversation on how new policy directions might play out for parents, providers and the public at large.

Planners for the event also hoped to build on the strategic thinking and momentum developed over the past decade in both policy and practice to move toward higher-quality, more integrated services for children and families. With so many programs now experienced at collaboration with DOE and ACS, the hope was to share lessons learned as new leadership emerges in both the Mayor's and Governor's offices.

The forum was structured to elicit both the new thinking from policymakers and from providers on the ground, with presentations from the top city and state officials followed by respondents who considered the presentations from the point of view of parents, providers and broad policy. Smaller break-out groups

then explored the issues in more depth, with specific feedback for policymakers and recommendations for next steps in creating a more unified, high-quality early childhood system. More than 250 early childhood educators and advocates packed the UJA Federation's Conference Center, abuzz with ideas and inspired by the new commitments that emerged over the course of the forum.

The View from Albany: A New Birth to Five Agenda

Closer Collaboration with City,
Advocates and Providers

Governor Eliot Spitzer's campaign promise that "On Day One, Everything Changes," came through loud and clear, when Olivia Golden, the Governor's newly-appointed chief of operations, presented the view from Albany.

"This is an extraordinary moment of opportunity for young children in New York State. The Governor's commitment to an early education agenda for young children from birth to age five, his strong budgetary support for that agenda, an energetic and united advocacy community, and strong support in New York city and across the state—all of this adds up to an opportunity all of us need to seize," Golden said.

The emphasis on a birth to five agenda, with new focus on resources and policies to serve the needs of infants and toddlers, came as the first new message—one the Governor had included in his State of the State address. It was the first time in recent memory, in fact, that a governor and top aides made a priority of children's services and expressed an interest in a coherent strategy starting at birth. Golden encouraged

forum participants to re-commit themselves to a holistic early childhood policy agenda as a "two generational strategy," that helps both parents and children succeed. As a long time children's advocate and government official—she served as a top administrator at the Federal Health and Human Services Administration during the Clinton Administration—Golden brings a wealth of experience to the Spitzer administration's commitment to quality, comprehensive services for young children.

"We need to do it right. Research has documented what we need to do, and we need to be referring to that research more," she said. In particular, she cited the impressive outcomes achieved in Early Head Start programs, which take a two-generational approach to children and families. "Programs need to adapt to family needs, including non-traditional work hours and rigid workplaces," she said.

Golden emphasized the need to make infants and toddlers a "new priority" in the state, and lauded the work of the National Center on Children in Poverty, which recognizes high-quality early childhood services as a "gateway" that connect children and their families to other services, including health and mental health care. In her new role as director of state operations, Golden also expressed a keen interest in developing new working relationships with the city to spark improvement in early childhood services.

Golden also underscored the theme already so closely associated with the Spitzer administration—the need for linking accountability with any new public funding. "I believe we can make a difference if we do things right," she said.

She has since been named head of the new state Children's Cabinet, created to oversee children's services. The Cabinet will be co-chaired by Dennis Whalen, Secretary of Health and Human Services and Manny Rivera, Deputy Secretary for Education.

The governor has promised the cabinet will carry out a new children's agenda, which includes rolling out the state prekindergarten program and universal health insurance for all children. The legislature has approved the Governor's first phase of statewide expansion of prekindergarten services, adding \$146 million for the program this year. The Governor pledged to continue the expansion during his first term, with the aim of reaching universal enrollment for all four-year-olds.

"Programs need to adapt to family needs, including non-traditional work hours and rigid workplaces."

Olivia Golden
Director of State Operations,
Office of the New York State
Governor



Photo credit: Todd Boerssoff

The View from the Mayor's Office:

Officials Announce Formation of New Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee

The view from the city was no less energetic. The Spitzer administration's commitment to pre-k translated into \$60 million in new state funding for pre-k expansion. In anticipation of new funding, the city had already issued its first-ever RFP to include a request for full-day pre-k services from community-based providers. Final state budget decisions were on the table even as the forum began, with participants and Mayoral aides alike eager to learn the details of how the new funding would be allocated. Mayor Bloomberg has pledged to double the number of children in early childhood education programs, and both the Mayor and the Chancellor had also endorsed making pre-k a top priority as new education funding came the city's way.



"The time is right to make significant and meaningful strides in our efforts to build a unified and seamless early care and education system."

Jennifer Jones Austin
Family Services Coordinator
Deputy Mayors Office for
Health and Human Services

Mayoral aides Jennifer Jones Austin and Alan Gartner addressed those issues directly in their presentations, announcing that they now co-chair the New York City Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee to map out the next steps in pre-k implementation and to move the city toward a more unified approach to early care and education. (See: *"The New York Early Care and Education Policy Committee: Its Mission"* on page 6.)

"The time is right to make significant and meaningful strides in our efforts to build a unified and seamless early care and education system in our city and our State," Jennifer Jones Austin, Family Services Coordinator from the Deputy Mayor's Office for Health and Human Services, told the forum.

Advocates and providers have long urged the Mayor to create just such leadership to better coordinate the policies and procedures at city agencies to support quality, integrated services for children and families. (Visit www.ecsgnyc.org to learn more about the early childhood community's proposals to expand quality learning opportunities to children under five.)

The new policy steering committee is charged with developing both short- and long-term strategies to integrate and better coordinate early childhood services. The committee is also charged with exploring how the city can simplify access and enrollment. The immediate project on the committee's plate, however, is implementation of the broad expansion of pre-k in the coming academic year.

The new steering committee has already jump-started significant new collaboration between three city agencies, the Department of Education (DOE), the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). Over the winter, staff from DOE and ACS began to share data and map resources as part of the planning for the next stage of pre-k expansion. The three agencies held a retreat to discuss common areas of concern and the best ways to leverage all resources to create quality early childhood education.

The Next Frontier: Full-Day Pre-K at Community Sites?

Priority, But Funding Still At Issue

Few issues gained more visibility at the forum, however, than whether the city would fund full-day pre-k services at community sites. The City Council Speaker made full-day pre-k a top priority last year, but to date, the city has only funded full-day services in public schools—despite broad interest among families and providers in having full-day pre-k at community sites that provide extended-day, year-round services. With an RFP still on the table in the Mayor's office, many community providers and parents now await word on how many programs may be greenlighted for a full-day. Many providers and advocates also await word on how the city intends to coordinate different funding streams and align standards across programs as pre-k services expand. (See *"Service Delivery: Challenges and Opportunities"* on page 4.)



“The next frontier in early childhood education is full-day pre-k.”

Alan Gartner
Chief of Staff for the Deputy Mayor for Education and Community Development

Mayoral aides embraced the new priority, but warned the early childhood providers and advocates that there was, at yet, no firm commitment on funding

full-day services. “The next frontier in early childhood education is full-day pre-k,” Alan Gartner, chief of staff for the Deputy Mayor for Education and Community Development and co-chair of the new policy steering committee. “We know it benefits children and that many families need it. It’s our next big fight. We need to make this happen.”

Gartner told the gathering that city officials had pressed hard in Albany to win flexibility in state pre-k funding to support full-day options at community sites as well as in the schools. He expressed concern about the city’s ability to fund full-day services at community sites, without more flexibility in state funding.

Jones Austin also acknowledged the need to fund a range of options that make access to pre-k easier for

Service Delivery: Opportunities and Challenges

Participants at the spring forum broke out into smaller groups to consider the implications of the panels’ comments, from several different perspectives. When it came to service providers, they saw several key challenges and opportunities ahead.

Many were happy to hear city and state officials describe a vision that would move toward the creation of a seamless and diverse system of early childhood services. The emphasis on mental health services for the whole family and collaborative funding held particular appeal.

Yet many also worried aloud about exactly how the city would move to integrate services. Would new policies support the full cost of pre-k services at all sites? That concern was particularly urgent among programs with ACS contracts. Another key question: Would assessments and standards be aligned across programs to produce the best outcomes for children? What impact would new assessment tools have on programs?

Biggest opportunities for providers in new policy directions

Community-based programs have the experience and capacity to provide year-round, extended day

services that so many families need. With the right funding levels and appropriate coordination among city agencies, the move to integrate services could:

- Expand professional development opportunities for teachers and staff
- Expand opportunities to develop and disseminate best practices across all settings
- Identify strategies and provide resources for programs to improve quality of services

Biggest challenges in new policy directions

After years of working with multiple city agencies, many participants also believed some major challenges lurked ahead as public officials seek to further integrate early childhood services.

- Strengthen the powerful partnership between community programs and the public education system
- Provide sufficient funding to community programs to support quality programs
- Ensure that all settings, both in the schools and at community sites, adhere to developmentally appropriate practice
- Move toward closing the disparity between teacher compensation in the schools and at community sites

families and children. “My job is to work with agency leaders to achieve new program designs and business models that ensure that as city Government, we are more responsive to individual and community needs and that our systems work for our families,” she said.

As the final state budget emerged in the days after the forum, providers and advocates continued to seek ways to move the city toward full-day pre-k at community sites. The Governor’s new Contract for Excellence offered one new avenue to full-day services in community-based organizations, but city officials had made no firm commitments as this report went to press. (See: “Budget and Policy Update” on page 8 for news on the latest policy debate.)

New Attention to Compensation for Early Childhood Workforce

City Officials also spoke to another issue that was top of mind for most participants in the forum—the poor compensation for early childhood educators working at community-based sites. Indeed, the Mayoral aides acknowledged an issue that creates one of the key pressure points in the city’s early childhood system: The disparity in salaries earned by teachers working in the public schools and those working at community sites. With teachers in the public schools making far more than those in community programs, these programs have become a virtual training ground for the public schools. Once teachers achieve certification, they usually move on to public schools where they can earn higher salaries, work a shorter year and also get more generous health, vacation and retirement benefits.

“Poor teacher compensation not only makes it difficult for programs to recruit highly-trained staff members, but it also has a negative impact on the



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Nancy Kolben
Executive Director,
Child Care, Inc.

quality of early childhood education by lowering teacher morale and causing high teacher turnover that is disruptive to the learning environment,” Fatima Goldman, Chief Executive Officer of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, pointed out in her comments as a responder to the keynote addresses.

Gartner revealed that city officials are now not only better informed on the issue, but have also begun to search for new policies to address it. The week before the forum, for example, the city’s top education officials not only lobbied legislators to make pre-k funding more flexible so it could be used for full-day services, but also added an innovative proposal aimed at addressing the issue of teacher compensation at community programs. DOE urged state lawmakers to add \$500 per child to state pre-k funding used at community sites, which would have added \$9,000 per classroom to pre-k funding for CBO’s. State lawmakers did not adopt the idea, but City Council Speaker Christine Quinn has since added a similar proposal to her city budget priorities.

“We are pleased to see these new policy ideas coming from city officials,” said Nancy Kolben, Executive Director, Child Care, Inc. “Community-based programs have long struggled with rates that did not support the cost of having a certified teacher in the classroom. It’s a huge challenge for early childhood providers across the city.”



“Poor teacher compensation has a negative impact on the quality of early childhood education.”

Fatima Goldman
Chief Executive Officer of
the Federation of Protestant
Welfare Agencies

New Hopes and Concerns Emerge in Break-Out Sessions

Advocates and service providers had a chance to respond and reflect on new policy directions presented at the meeting, during small group sessions run by facilitators from the early childhood field. The energy and commitment of both city and state policymakers inspired a broad sense of optimism among many participants. “It’s exciting to see alignment of the stars!” said Meredith Wiley, from Fight Crime/Invest in Kids. “The Mayor and the Governor are talking the same language and making the same priorities. Advocates need to seize this opportunity!”

At the same time, many remained concerned about issues not yet addressed by or possibly overlooked by city and state policymakers. The city’s new policy steering committee on early care and education, for example, has yet to include the city’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in deliberations and planning. Given that the health department has broad regulatory oversight over early childhood services—and the health department is in the midst of reviewing all of its regulations for programs serving young children, the oversight was considered problematic by some.

Jones Austin said the steering committee was in the process of adding the health department to its deliberations.

The issue of how parents and providers can contribute to the steering committee’s work also came forward, especially in immigrant communities and changing neighborhoods. “We need to integrate family support into planning for early care and education,” Anthea McLaughlin, Associate Director for Agenda for Children Tomorrow, told the gathering. “Children exist in communities. We are all serving the entire family.”

Those concerns headlined the break-out sessions that focused on parents’ concerns and issues. Participants thought state and city policies should be more in sync with the rhythm of families’ lives. “Families have to live by school schedules and they have to make the decisions about the fall in the spring. But the city and state budgets aren’t even settled by then, which makes it hard for parents to decide what to do,” said Loren Miller, who works closely with parents as part of her work at Bushwick IMPACT. (See *Parent Perspectives: Opportunities and*

NYC Early Care & Education Policy Steering Committee: Its Mission

The New York Care & Education Policy Steering Committee is comprised of senior level representatives from the Department of Education, Administration for Children’s Services and the Department of Youth & Community Development and the Office of the Mayor. The newly-created group is charged with developing short and long-term strategies for development of a coordinated and unified early care and education system in New York City. The coordination issues being assessed include, but are not limited to, service expansion, quality enhancement and integration of services.

Co-Chairs:

Jennifer Jones Austin
*Family Services Coordinator for the city,
from Deputy Mayor’s Office for Health and
Human Services*

Alan Gartner
*Chief of Staff, Deputy Mayor’s Office for
Education and Community Development
Director of Research, Office of the Mayor*

Challenges” on page 7.)

The timing of the city’s final decisions can also change parents’ decisions and disrupt community-based programs. “If the city decides to fund full-day services at a public school near us and makes the announcement late in the summer, like last year, then suddenly we may have an enrollment problem,” said one Bronx-based provider. “We are happy that parents have more choices, but without better coordination, we may disrupt or change one service as we expand another.”

More than 600 community programs now offer public pre-k, often in combination with other early childhood services such as Head Start, child care or preschool special education. For years, programs themselves have negotiated individually with city agencies, working out the details of cost allocations

Parent Perspectives: Opportunities and Challenges

During the forum, the participants broke out into smaller groups to consider what they had heard, and where they saw opportunities and challenges in public policy. When it came to the perspective of parents, the small groups heard some promising insights from the panel. First, many were encouraged that Olivia Golden spoke about a two-generational approach to early childhood service delivery—creating a system that is responsive to the needs of both parents and children. They were also encouraged that she mentioned the full range of supports, from birth to five, including family outreach and early-childhood focused home visiting programs.

The participants were also encouraged by the push for full day prekindergarten championed by Alan Gartner.

Many remained concerned, however, that on the city level, much of the discussion of service coordination, integration, and expansion seems to focus exclusively around children and did not include dialogue about parents, families, and communities.

and program standards. The prospect of new Mayoral leadership could help make sure that funding supports high-quality core services—including having qualified teachers, adequate resources for children to learn and professional development opportunities for the staff. So far, many participants at the forum said, they have managed to braid funding and comply with even conflicting regulations to make things work for families. But it's not easy. "It's like having three or four masters," said one, "and sometimes each one has a different thing to tell you about the very same thing—the way the classroom is set up, whether a child can take a nap, who should be covering certain costs."

"It can make you crazy," she adds. "But you make it work because you want to make it work for families and children."

Because the early childhood system is now so large and diverse, with DOE, ACS and DOHMH all playing critical roles in management and oversight and because funding levels have not kept pace with

Biggest opportunities in the policy directions

The participants felt the new policy directions offered the opportunity to include more input from parents, families and communities, especially as the city considers the best ways to coordinate services funding, and expansion of the early education system. There was some hope that the city might create linkages between Head Start and Child Care, for example, via the Community Partnership Initiative. There was also hope the city would pay more attention to families' needs for infant/toddler care and for child care of all kinds during non-traditional hours since so many parents must now work non-traditional hours and more than one job.

Biggest challenges in the policy directions

For parents, the biggest challenges are accessing quality care and being able to afford it. Participants cited the child support enforcement requirements, changing eligibility requirements and the complex bureaucracy families must navigate to secure child care even when they qualify for a subsidy.

the cost of providing services, most providers find it harder than ever to make things work for families. "The real question is whether the city will provide a level of service that supports quality," says Jorge Saenz di Viteri, who runs the Bronx Community College's Child Development Center. "The public agencies have to coordinate policies better and the funding has to



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Anthea McLaughlin
Associate Director Agenda for
Children Tomorrow

come in at a level that supports quality.”

That makes the new leadership in the Mayor’s office all the more critical, which Jones Austin acknowledge. “This is the major thrust of the Early Care and Education Policy Steering Committee—to develop, formalize and institutionalize coordination across the agencies serving children and their families,” she said.

The task is a daunting one, she conceded. “We’re building this coordination, block by block.” The city is using assessments of needs and gaps in service as well as data on programs and children served to identify the best ways to move toward a coordinated system. She said the city is also developing uniform performance standards and cost allocation strategies as part of creating a more unified system.

Co-Sponsors for the Forum

The UJA Federation generously provided space for the forum. In addition, Quality New York, (www.qualitynewyork.org) an initiative which seeks to improve the quality of early childhood education by helping programs gain accreditation, co-sponsored the event. The Early Childhood Strategic Group, (www.ecsgnyc.org) is a partnership of 20 organizations working to promote a more unified, high-quality system of early care and education in New York City.

To learn more about this report, contact bholcomb@childcareinc.org.



Budget and Policy Update: New Pre-K Developments in the City

As this report went to press, many new policy developments emerged.

Most importantly, the city did receive \$60 million in new pre-k funding, but has so far only contracted for half-day services. City officials continue to seek more flexibility in state funding, with the aim of using at least some of the funding for full-day options.

At the same time, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn has once again called for an expansion of full-day pre-k in a way that will support the partnership with community-based organizations. Quinn has called for a city investment of \$10 million, with \$7 million used for full-day services and \$3 million used to improve compensation for pre-k teachers.

As the budget negotiations continued, the Mayor’s office sent out letters to providers indicating the city’s intent to further integrate early childhood services, with the goal of using Universal Prekindergarten funding as the core funding for four-year-olds in the years to come. Community-based organizations holding contracts with the Administration for Children’s Services have been urged to apply for pre-k funding to help the city meet its pre-k enrollment targets. “The city’s vision for publicly funded early care and education includes subsidized child care for children ages 0-3 from at-risk, low income families, universal care and education services for four year olds, supported primarily with UPK funds and kindergarten education with appropriate out-of-school time activities for children when they turn five,” a May 15 letter from Deputy Mayors Walcott and Gibbs told providers.

Advocates and providers have responded that the city needs to fund all early childhood programs at a level that supports quality programs, which includes enough funding to recruit and retain certified teachers, professional development and family supports.

Advocates have also asked the Department of Education to earmark at least \$20 million of the new Contract for Excellence education funding for full-day pre-k. The Contract specifically allows the city to support full-day pre-k with this funding. “This not only begins to fulfill the promises the Chancellor and Mayor have made to expand full-day pre-k with the new education aid,” says Kolben. “But it is also the time to clearly signal that prekindergarten is a priority for this city as the new aid starts to come in.” (To learn more about the proposal to expand pre-k with the “Contract for Excellence,” visit www.childcareinc.org and click on “public policy.”)